



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on October 10, 2016

Published in the October 10, 2016 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 32, No. 19

Phyllis Schlafly: Conservative Icon

Phyllis Schlafly, aptly labeled by friend and foe as “the first lady of the conservative movement,” succumbed to cancer on September 5 at her home in Ladue, Missouri. She had reached age 92. Known well by subscribers to *The New American* and members of The John Birch Society, her long career as a prominent leader of conservative and anti-communist causes set her apart from the many liberals and internationalists who grudgingly acknowledged her tenacity and ability to stand in the way of their attempts to undo America.



The Early Years

Born Phyllis McAlpin Stewart on August 15, 1924, she was the daughter of Ernest and Odile Stewart, who raised her in their St. Louis home. She attended Maryville College in Saint Louis, but transferred to that city’s Washington University, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in only three years. Self-financing her education during the World War II years, she worked at an ammunition plant, where her job included test-firing the ammunition in machine guns. Off to Massachusetts in 1944, she earned a degree in political science (1945) at Radcliffe College, a female college associated with Harvard that was later absorbed by the university. Originally a supporter of establishment Republicans, such as the party’s presidential candidates Wendell Willkie and Thomas Dewey in the 1940s, she also favored the United Nations and thought the United States benefited from trade pacts such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which morphed into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. But her devotion to establishment Republicans, the United Nations, dangerous trade pacts (including the WTO), and other initiatives favored by liberals and internationalists soon faded. Early in her career, she became a leading opponent of all of them.

After gaining her 1945 political science degree at Radcliffe, Phyllis moved to Washington in hopes of securing a government job. Failing to find a place within the bureaucratic maze, she gained employment with the American Enterprise Association, eventually renamed the American Enterprise Institute. Back to St. Louis in 1946, she worked in the successful congressional campaign of Republican Claude Bakewell. From there, she took a job as a researcher at a St. Louis bank, where one of her tasks found her writing commentaries about current events. Though the bank distributed her work throughout the St. Louis area, her name never appeared as its author.

Across the Mississippi River in Alton, Illinois, prominent and well-to-do attorney J. Fred Schlafly became so impressed with those commentaries that he sought to meet the author. Friends said he was stunned to find that it was “a girl.” He would later state that the initial meeting with Phyllis resulted in “love at first sight.” Barely a year later, they married on October 24, 1949. Phyllis was 25 and Fred 39. Both fervent Catholics, they set up a home in Alton and raised a family of six children. Fred Schlafly passed



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away in 1993.

Getting Involved in the World of Politics

In 1952, prominent area Republicans sought Fred Schlafly to seek a seat in the U.S. Congress. When he turned them down, Phyllis offered herself for the post and won the GOP's primary, but lost the election. Undaunted, she began speaking at gatherings of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and soon accepted the presidency of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women. In 1958, along with Father C. Stephen Dunker, a missionary priest who had been abused by communists in China, the Schlaflys launched the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation. Aimed to help Catholics become more aware of the communist threat to the church and the nation, the organization took its name from the valiant Catholic leader of Hungary who had been tortured and jailed by communists. Eleanor Schlafly, a member of the extended Schlafly family, became the foundation's leader.

Even while lending her voice and ability to political efforts, the ever-energetic Phyllis presided over the early education of her six children. Before they entered school, she taught each to read from a phonics text she acquired. Three of her six offspring became lawyers, one a physician, one a Ph.D. mathematician, and one a businesswoman. During these years, she wrote about the dangers to America of communism and served as the national defense chairman of the DAR.

In less obvious ways, her husband also involved himself in the affairs of the nation, and he is believed by many to have been one of the authors of the superb 1958 *Report of the American Bar Association Special Committee on Communist Tactics, Strategy and Objectives*. That document's hard-hitting analysis of communist progress within America captured widespread attention, and to help in its dissemination, Senator Styles Bridges (R-N.H.) placed the entire document in the *Congressional Record* for August 22, 1958. In a fact-packed 20 pages, it condemned the many damaging decisions of the Warren Supreme Court, discussed the penetration of our nation by communists, listed the overall goals of America's determined enemy, and even corrected current fallacies about communism. Reprinted as a booklet by the newly formed John Birch Society, the study's powerful message alarmed many and spurred them on to become involved in efforts to protect the nation.

In 1962, Phyllis launched "America Wake Up!" a 15-minute radio show heard on numerous Illinois stations. She rocketed to national fame in 1964, however, with her small paperback *A Choice Not an Echo*. Accurately credited with helping Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater win the GOP nomination for president, the book saw a distribution of more than three million copies. Though small in size, it packed a powerful punch, capably alerting Americans about the takeover of top echelons of the Republican Party by individuals she labeled "secret kingmakers" and "Rockefeller Republicans." At the time, she did not name the Council on Foreign Relations as the seat of the liberal and internationalist power she targeted, but in 1975, the book *Kissinger on the Couch*, which she co-authored with Retired Admiral Chester Ward, condemned the CFR in no uncertain terms. Admiral Ward, the former judge advocate general of the U.S. Navy, had spent 20 years as a member of the council and knew very well how the establishment's kingmakers operated and why they should be exposed as a danger to our country. A pro-Goldwater delegate to the 1964 GOP national convention, Phyllis became either a delegate or a prominent attendee at all subsequent Republican conventions.

A Choice Not an Echo (the first of 20 books she either wrote or published) certainly didn't endear Phyllis to members the GOP's Rockefeller wing. Payback from them came in 1967 when Phyllis had



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dutifully risen through the various official chairs of the National Federation of Republican Women. During the organization's meeting, when the new president would be named, Nelson Rockefeller had arranged to fill the gathering with busloads of women from the Northeast, who took control and denied her what clearly should have been her post for the coming year.

Bruised but hardly beaten, she ran for Congress in 1970 but lost to an incumbent Democrat. In 1967, she started publishing a newsletter entitled *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. She provided audio commentaries to Chicago's WBBM from 1973 to 1975, to CBS Morning News for two years, and then to CNN from 1980 to 1983. By 1989, she had begun hosting a weekly radio talk show known as *Eagle Forum Live*.

Success in the Fight Against the Equal Rights Amendment

In 1972, Schlafly devoted much of her attention to blocking the addition of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Originally unconcerned about the ERA, she studied it at the request of a friend and discovered it to be a real danger to the nation and a serious denigration of the rightful place women have enjoyed in our country. The House of Representatives had already approved a resolution supporting the amendment, and the Senate was expected to do likewise. Something had to be done to block ratification by the required three-fourths of the states. So Phyllis launched the STOP ERA movement, with STOP actually an acronym for "Stop Taking Our Privileges." Years later, the venture became the Schlafly-led Eagle Forum.

JBS founder Robert Welch paid Schlafly a high compliment in the February 1973 edition of The John Birch Society's monthly *Bulletin* to members when he wrote:

We must confess to having made a mistake.... We grossly underrated the capacity of the American people for responding to hokum. The so-called Equal Rights Amendment seemed to us so obviously a combination of cruel joke and criminal idiocy that we refused for a whole year even to pay any attention to it. We did not see how it could be taken seriously by anybody, except possibly a very few old female battleaxes.... But we were wrong.

Fortunately, there were others who saw earlier that there was real danger here. Especially have Mrs. Phyllis Schlafly, as head of an organization called Stop E.R.A., and Mrs. Jaquie Davison, founder of one called Happiness of Womanhood ... done a superb job of rallying opposition, mostly by women.

Spurred on by what Welch had stated about the need to block passage of the ERA, members of The John Birch Society pitched in with their energy, financial means, and talent to join with Schlafly in the long but successful fight against further state ratifications. One of the first weapons in that fight was a November 1972 article published by the Society's affiliated *American Opinion* magazine. Authored by Congressman John Schmitz (R-Calif.), a proud member of the Society, "Look Out! They're Trying to Draft Your Daughter" became an extremely helpful weapon in alerting many Americans to the subversive goals of the amendment. It was only the first of many anti-ERA articles published and reprinted by the Society's magazines, and each new item gained wide dissemination.

Working side-by-side, STOP ERA groups and JBS members across the nation distributed literature, presented speakers, and informed legislators at the state level about the need for them either to block state ratification or rescind previous calls for a convention. Showing their humor, along with an obvious determination, some Utah members formed HOT DOG (an acronym for their local effort, Humanitarians



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Opposed To Degrading Our Girls). These opponents of the ERA distributed many thousands of the reprinted Schmitz article, followed by similar distributions of numerous anti-ERA tracts. Oklahoma State Senator Mary Helm and retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Andrew Gatsis, both JBS members, toured the nation spreading the anti-ERA message. And Phyllis spoke at a variety of forums and appeared on numerous radio and television interviews while submitting to countless press interviews.

As its opponents rightly charged, the ERA certainly did threaten to open the door for drafting women: Registering for a possible draft was required during those years. The proposed amendment would have opened the door for federal government regulation and social engineering of vast areas of American life, including mandated gender quotas in the work force, military, and education. Women's liberation forces did all they could to save the ERA. Schlafly's opponents from the National Organization for Women (NOW) labeled her a hypocrite who frequently left her husband and children to campaign against the ERA. Betty Friedan called her "Aunt Tom." Gloria Steinem and a succession of NOW leaders insisted that Schlafly's efforts against their pet project, done while she was claiming to be devoted to her husband and family, was a gross contradiction. NOW President Karen DeCrow debated Phyllis on several occasions where she would sarcastically declare, "If I had a daughter, I would like her to be a housewife just like Phyllis Schlafly." But Phyllis frequently responded to such personal attacks with: "I want to thank my husband, Fred, for letting me come here." Explaining her statement later, she said, "I like to say that because I know it irritates women's libbers more than anything else." In the later years of the 1970s, Phyllis even found time to enter law school at Washington University. She speedily earned her law degree and passed the bar exam but never practiced law. She wanted the knowledge that law school provided so she could more capably fight against the ERA.

Still the ERA amendment seemed well on its way to gaining the needed 38 state approvals for ratification. Only several more state ratifications were needed before the March 22, 1979 deadline set by Congress. But the combination of Schlafly-led STOP ERA groups and John Birch Society members not only stopped further ratifications, their dogged determination and solid information led five state legislatures to withdraw previous ratifications. When Congress took the unusual step of extending the ratification deadline by more than three years (to June 30, 1982), the anti-ERA partisans breathed a sigh of relief but continued their efforts. No more state legislatures ever ratified the amendment. In 1982, the fight was over and the ERA was dead.

Basking in victory, Phyllis staged a joyous burial party for the amendment at Washington's Shoreham Hotel. She told reporters that our nation could now "enter a new era of harmony between men and women." Ever since then, numerous commentators have credited Schlafly with a single-handed victory against the ERA. Most U.S. media repeated that assessment as an indisputable fact. But Britain's *Guardian* newspaper, while giving Phyllis proper credit, added: "Although she did not quite defeat the ERA 'single-handedly,' as many liked to claim, defeated it was." Phyllis herself would occasionally explain that success had been achieved by the work of her group — and the efforts of others.

Early Activity Consistent With Eventual Support of Trump

Robert Welch's February 1973 mention of Phyllis was not the first time JBS members were told of her excellent work. Earlier, when the society was still in its infancy and Phyllis had not emerged as a national figure, Robert Welch called attention to one of her letters that appeared in the January 2, 1960 issue of *National Review*. Promoting the value of loyalty oaths, she roundly chided *National Review*



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Editor William Buckley because of his claim that loyalty oaths were meaningless because they “tend to be of little practical value [because] subversives tend not to hesitate to swear falsely.” In her letter, Phyllis pointed out that communists Alger Hiss and William Remington had been convicted of perjury for lying about their membership in the Communist Party. Each went to prison after being tried and convicted. Phyllis insisted that loyalty oaths were not only needed, they were very useful in dealing with traitors who were also liars.

With her letter, Phyllis had actually shone an early light on what would soon become a far more obvious split between paleoconservatives (those holding traditional conservative views) and neoconservatives (those advocating a new or modernized stance that clashed with tradition). She didn’t use these terms in the letter she wrote to Buckley, but the difference between their competing points of view constituted an early “paleo” versus “neo” clash. Over the years, Buckley would become a leading promoter of neoconservative views, a topic explained at some length in this writer’s 2002 book *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Pied Piper for the Establishment*. (Available through ShopJBS.org.)

In 1962, she decided that Bill Buckley and his magazine were no longer worthy of her support. On February 8, she sent a letter to Buckley that started with a listing of her many relationships with him and *National Review*. She pointed to having been a charter subscriber, contributor, promoter, and more. Then she added: “I now ask you to cancel my subscription and send the refund to either Robert Welch or Pope John XXIII.” *U.S News & World Report’s* Nicole Hemmer commented about this stinging rebuke in her article about Schlafly’s passing:

Neither Welch nor His Holiness got the refund, at least not from Buckley. But the cancellation was not about money; it was about taking a stand. *National Review* had just come out against Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society, which Schlafly saw as a crucial organization in the fight against communism. She could see the fissures developing between an emerging mainstream conservative movement and a populist grassroots one, and she was planting her flag with the populists. In doing so, she helped groom a part of the American right that would one day coalesce its support behind Donald Trump.

Phyllis’ gutsy endorsement of Trump on March 11, 2016 at a point when the race for the GOP nomination was still undecided makes sense when it is understood that she viewed Trump as an outsider battling the establishment insiders, and was once again siding with the outsiders who supported America first and opposed the whole globalist agenda. Her decisive break with Buckley in 1962, her attack aimed at the GOP’s “kingmakers” in 1964’s *A Choice Not an Echo*, and her refusal to give in to the Rockefeller skullduggery that kept her from achieving what she had earned as the president of the National Federation of Republican Women amounted to her payback to the liberals and internationalists who had dominated the Republican Party for decades. She then chose to back Trump, knowing that some of her closest confreres in *Eagle Forum* and elsewhere didn’t agree with her choice. In typical Schlafly demeanor, she told the throng at the St. Louis Trump rally when she announced her endorsement:

I know who you came to see, so I’ll be quick. I think he has the courage and the energy — you know you have to have energy for that job — in order to bring about some changes — to do what the grass roots want him to do because this is a grass-roots uprising. We’ve been following the losers for so long — now we’ve got a guy who’s going to lead us to victory.



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Opposing Much More Than the ERA

Opposing passage of the ERA was certainly not Schlafly's only issue. As far back as 1962, she stimulated numerous Americans to protest the Supreme Court's banning of prayer in public schools. When the high court issued its infamous 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, opening the floodgates for abortion, she called the ruling "the worst decision in the history of the Supreme Court" and began fighting to protect life in the womb. She was outraged about the sex-education courses being given to youngsters in schools and wrote a book condemning it because she found it to be "a principal cause of teenage pregnancy."

Even while crusading against the ERA, Phyllis turned some of her attention toward maintaining America's military strength. In 1964, she issued a paperback entitled *The Gravediggers* to warn against participation with the Soviet Union in disarmament programs. With Admiral Chester Ward as her co-author of 1975's *Kissinger on the Couch*, she accused Henry Kissinger of planning to weaken America's military.

Some of her other works included *Child Abuse in the Classroom* (1984), *The Supremacists: Tyranny of the Judges* (2004), and *No Higher Power: Obama's War on Religious Freedom* (2012). Her latest book, issued almost simultaneously with her death and written with Ed Martin and Brett M. Decker, carries the title *The Conservative Case for Trump*.

In 2005, when the G.W. Bush administration announced plans to form a North American Union that would effectively cancel U.S. sovereignty and spur movement toward world government, Conservative Caucus leader Howard Phillips and this writer launched plans over a luncheon meeting to form the "Coalition to Block the North American Union." The five leaders of its steering committee immediately included the two founders named previously, American Policy Center leader Tom DeWeese, prolific author Jerome Corsi, and the ever-willing champion of U.S. independence Phyllis Schlafly. Movement toward joining Canada with the United States and Mexico, an important project emanating from the Council on Foreign Relations, moved from the internationalists' front burner to a closet in their back room.

On the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations in 1995, Schlafly urged that Americans should consider the date a "cause for mourning, not celebration." In more recent years, she registered her opposition to illegal immigration, same-sex "marriage," endless wars, national indebtedness, and the Obama administration's campaign to entangle the United States in sovereignty-compromising trade pacts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

In 2011, after a brief visit with Phyllis at a conservative convention in the nation's capital, college student and JBS member Christian Gomez received a warm thank-you letter from the "grand lady of the conservative movement." She thanked young Gomez for the information he had sent her opposing the creation of a constitutional convention. Calling that plan a "very stupid idea," she noted, "The JBS has always been on the right side of this issue." Her letter also thanked Gomez "for the book on Buckley" he had given her and added, "I read it and appreciate John [McManus] writing some things that needed to be said."

At the September 10, 2016 funeral for this exemplary American, the Schlafly family welcomed Donald Trump at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis where her Requiem Mass would be offered. Before the



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solemn liturgy began, one of Phyllis' sons gave Trump the microphone and, in his brief remarks, the Republican candidate for president stated: "Her legacy will live on every time some underdog, outmatched and outgunned, defies the odds and delivers a win for the people."

Phyllis Schlafly was indeed a champion for "the people" and a formidable opponent of the "kingmakers" she so capably targeted. R.I.P.

Photo of Phyllis Schlafly: Newscom

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